

Fight the Power by Khalif 'Ras' Williams



Fight the Power would widely be considered one of the most important songs in the history of Hip Hop music. Its deafening layered drum patterns and drum rolls resound like the explosions of heavy artillery fire and cluster bombs delivered with deadly accuracy to targets and strong holds of white supremacy. The lyrics are like full clips of hollow point shells exploding on impact to awaken the consciousness of the listener to not sit idly by while the same system of oppression we live within continues to exploit low income US citizens of color. Today there is a heavy silent complacency that marks the new millennium that didn't exist at the time of the making of *Do the Right Thing*.

Originally Spike Lee approached Chuck D about making the song that would become the anthem of the film because he felt (rightfully so) **only P.E. could bring the sound and lyrical ammunition** necessary to deliver the aural assault that we now know of as *Fight the Power*. This song topped VH1's 100 Greatest Hip Hop songs of all time. This is proof positive of the impact of the song on the Hip Hop community and the world when it was released.

Public Enemy's first attempt at a song for the movie wasn't what Spike was looking for. But after further discussion with Chuck D and a two week incubation period, P.E. birthed the song that not only defined the film but defined an era of modern post Civil Rights era Black struggle for racial equality and an end to racial intolerance. This struggle marked the other not so well known grassroots side of the 'Crack Era', that side was conscious and socially and politically active not only in New York City but across the country. From the Crips and Bloods truce in California after the L.A. Riots to the Stop the Violence movements taking place across New York City to curb youth violence. The Crack Era had a lot more than just druggies, dealers and killers it also gave birth to brave citizens actively seeking positive change. Even at risk to their personal safety.

Fight the Power was played 15 times in the film and if the song is looked at correctly the song along with Raheem's radio combined to form a formidable antagonist which took on a life of it's own during the unfolding of the story.

Fight the Power was played during the opening scenes of the movie with Rosie Perez making her film debut as an actress and exploding upon the scene visually to become one of the most

important choreographers in show business. Rosie Perez gave one of the most memorable dance routines ever committed to film. It stands right along side Flash Dance and Dirty Dancing as far as the impact it made on the audience who watched the film when it was originally released. She symbolically fought the power with the light footed dexterous steps of championship boxer in his prime bobbing and weaving oppression delivering the knock out blow to hatred that Radio Raheem exemplified in his Love versus Hate sequence of the film.

If Radio Raheem was the Alpha male of the community commanding maximum respect even from those who didn't like him in the hood, *Fight the Power* and that radio was Robin to Raheem's Bat Man. The Radio was Raheem's trusty side kick conveying a message of resistance and an uncompromising challenge to all that stood in his way that he reigned supreme on his block.

Radio Raheem used that song to defend his honor in the tradition of Hip Hop when challenged by the Puerto Rican crew on the stoop trying to out play *Fight the Power* with a radio ill equipped to drown out the overwhelming decibels blazing from Radio Raheem's ghetto blaster speakers. He also used it to draw a line in the sand and display his allegiance to Buggin Out and his idea that there needed to be black faces on Sal's Wall of Fame in his and Sal's first confrontation. The song was there as a constant reminder that at any moment anything could happen.

Through out the film the song made many appearances and Radio Raheem lived vicariously through the strength and power of the song. When Sal finally delivered a death blow to Raheem's radio with the baseball bat, it was like he killed a part of Raheem himself. The Radio and the song embodied the essence of not only Raheem's struggle to live out loud but all black men's struggle to be heard in a world that seems to silence black males either systematically by jailing disproportionate numbers of our youth or by killing them in incidents of racial violence and police misconduct. In doing so society is introducing them to the revolving door of new aged slavery instated by the prison industrial complex or death for those young black males who don't know how to operate within the system with their sanity, morals, and lives intact. The volatile unpredictability of racial intolerance is something that has been prevalent since the founding of this country and was displayed with an intensity unseen in American cinema before this film. Decade's later movies like Crash would borrow from this theme of unpredictability and racial intolerance in the future. Even though the radio and the song was silenced permanently during the film, the song has lived on eternally to inspire future generations to embrace and stand for change allowing *Fight the Power* to be the soundtrack to the lives of those who struggle to better our society one person and racial incident at a time.

